



## HARFORD COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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**NEWS RELEASE: 11:02**

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **FEBRUARY, 2011 OBSERVED AS CHILDRENS DENTAL HEALTH MONTH IN HARFORD COUNTY**

**Bel Air, MD – February 17, 2011** – February is the observance of National Children's Dental Health Month, placing emphasis on the need for parents to take action early to ensure the health of their children's teeth. Many people are unaware of the important role early dental care plays in children's overall health and that attitudes and habits established at an early age are critical in maintaining good oral health throughout life.

The Harford County Health Department reminds the public that tooth decay is the most common chronic disease found in children, occurring five times as commonly as asthma and seven times as commonly as hay fever. Each year, more than 51 million school hours are lost due to dental related problems. Fortunately, with good oral health care habits, tooth decay can be prevented.

According to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 18 percent of children ages two to four have experienced tooth decay, and nearly one out of six have untreated tooth decay. By age 17, more than seven percent of children have lost at least one permanent tooth due to decay. In Maryland, 31 percent of kindergarten and third grade children have tooth decay that, if it remains untreated, causes pain and infections that may lead to problems with eating, speaking, playing and learning.

"Taking care of your children's teeth, including baby teeth, from the very start is the key to good oral health," states Susan Kelly, Harford County's Health Officer. "A child should visit the dentist when his or her first tooth appears, or by his or her first birthday." She goes on to stress to parents the importance of serving as role models and teaching their children good oral (dental) health care habits, including proper brushing and flossing techniques, eating nutritious foods and making regular visits to the dentist. Continues Ms. Kelly, "As a result of opening our dental health clinic in March 31, 2008, the Health Department offers dental services to children who may never before have had a dental exam . . . in a county with one of the highest rates of dental disease in the state."

Now celebrating its third year of operation, the Health Department's Dental Clinic has had remarkable record of success responding to the oral health care needs of more than 4,500 children and pregnant women enrolled in the Medical Assistance Program. The facility is located at 2204 Hanson Road in the Edgewood Plaza Shopping Center in Edgewood and serves as a dental home for children ages 1 – 20 who are enrolled in the Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP) and for pregnant women on MCHP. It provides general and preventive dental care including cleanings, oral examinations, fluoride treatments, fillings and sealants. In addition, a partnership has been established with dentists in the community who accept referrals from the Dental Clinic for specialty and emergency services for both children and a special population of adults.

The opening of the clinic was made possible through the generous support of the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission, the Drescher Foundation, and state and county support. Aside from a small yearly state grant, Mrs. Kelly states that the clinic is achieving its goal of becoming self-supporting.

“The benefits of creating a public health dental clinic in Harford County translates even further than improving oral health,” explains Dr. Harry Goodman, the State’s Oral Health Program Director, and a resident of Harford County. “Providing dental services also improves a child’s general health and self-esteem, prevents chronic health problems, and reduces school absenteeism rates resulting in higher academic achievement.”

For more information about Harford County’s public health dental clinic or to schedule an appointment, please call (443) 922-7670. Additional information on childhood dental health can be obtained by visiting [www.harfordcountyhealth.com](http://www.harfordcountyhealth.com) or [www.fha.state.md.us/oralhealth/](http://www.fha.state.md.us/oralhealth/).

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